

FISH & WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: August 8, 2013

Agenda Item: Proposed 2013 Early Migratory Bird Seasons

Division: Wildlife

Action Needed: Approval of Final Rule

Time for this Presentation: 10 minutes

Background

Migratory bird seasons have direct federal oversight and coordination, and seasons must be set within federal frameworks. Mourning dove and common snipe have fixed season dates (Sept.1-Oct. 30 for doves; Sept. 1-Dec. 16 for snipe) and fixed bag/possession limits from year to year, barring significant changes in dove population indices. No changes are proposed for the 2013 mourning dove and common snipe seasons.

The Rocky Mountain Population (RMP) of sandhill cranes is annually monitored, with individual states' allowable harvest quotas based upon observed numbers and coordinated with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. In Montana, crane numbers and hunter access have been used to set permit numbers for each of five areas (Dillon/Twin Bridges/Cardwell, Warm Springs area, Ovando-Helmville, Wheatland/Meagher/Golden Valley/portion of Sweetgrass Counties, and Broadwater County). RMP crane numbers were down considerably in the multi-state, coordinated survey in September 2012, so the allowable harvest for each state will be reduced. Montana's RMP harvest allocation will be reduced from 223 in 2012 to 144 in 2013. The Montana crane harvest has consistently been well below allowable levels, with an estimate of 129 birds taken in 2012, compared to a harvest allocation of 223. Consequently, FWP proposes maintaining 2012 permit numbers for the 2013 season. Numbers of permits and hunters have been kept low in some areas due to limited hunter access. The remainder of the Central Flyway is under frameworks for mid-continent sandhill cranes, for which the federal framework remains unchanged for 2013.

The USFWS recently approved a change to allow possession limits to be 3 times the daily bag limit for all species that currently have a 2 times possession limit. FWP proposes changing possession limits accordingly.

FWP proposes no changes to either RMP or the mid-continent crane season for 2013 although season dates would change for both due to calendar progression, but with no change in season length.

Season dates for RMP sandhill cranes (special drawn permits): Sept. 7- Sept. 29

Season dates for mid-continent sandhill cranes: Sept. 28– Nov. 24

Increase the mourning dove and common snipe possession limits to 45 and 24, respectively.

Alternatives and Analysis

Proposals may be adopted as proposed, with adjustment, with additions, or with deletions as per staff justifications, public comment and/or commission discussion.

Public Involvement Process & Results

The public comment period will run through 5 p.m. Monday, Aug. 5. As of July 22, FWP received three comments, in support of the proposal.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale

FWP recommends the commission adopt the proposed 2013 early migratory seasons. This is consistent with known wildlife biology, management history and survey efforts. The proposed seasons are within the frameworks established by the USFWS.

Proposed Motion

I move to adopt the final 2013 early season migratory bird seasons as proposed by FWP.